



## Processing and Marketing Organically Grown Vegetables - *PROEXSAL* in El Salvador

No. 10

**P**ROEXSAL, headquartered in San Salvador, is an agricultural marketing cooperative composed of several agricultural production cooperatives, a technical assistance organization, and an agro-processing plant—financed by Inter-American Foundation grant ES-170—located in the department of Chalatenango, where it processes the vegetables from the nearby Los Planes and Las Palmas farm areas, benefiting directly 20 farmers and creating full-time employment positions for 25 women.

### PROEXSAL ACHIEVES RESULTS

With IAF's three-year funding, PROEXSAL built a network of buyers in the metropolitan area of San Salvador, including the major hotels, restaurants, and supermarkets. Biweekly, PROEXSAL delivers organically grown products such as lettuce, cabbage, baby carrots, spring onions, and other vegetables to these establishments.

#### Project results include:

##### INCOME

- ❖ The promotion of small-scale growers' year-round planting and harvesting practices increased income. Cooperative earnings also increased when new markets for organically grown vegetables were opened.

##### EMPLOYMENT

- ❖ Thirty young women work at the packing plant. Previously, they were either unemployed or working in the fields for wages two-thirds below what they earn currently.
- ❖ Sixty agricultural workers work in vegetable production.
- ❖ Six employees work in distribution and sales.

##### FACILITIES AND EQUIPMENT

- ❖ A packing plant was built with a refrigerated area.
- ❖ A greenhouse was constructed and is being used to grow 12,000 seedlings per week using organic techniques.
- ❖ A computerized bookkeeping system was installed.



Women working at the vegetable processing facility at Los Planes.  
(Photo: Miguel Cuevas)

### KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS

- ❖ Packing plant staff learned and applied crop-processing techniques.
- ❖ Packing plant supervisors learned and applied computer skills to bookkeeping.
- ❖ Vegetable growers learned and applied organic farming practices on their farms.

### UNEXPECTED PROJECT RESULTS

- ❖ Health conditions of packing plant workers improved because regular medical checkups were required for employment.
- ❖ Small stores and "pupuserías" (a traditional food stand) sprouted near the packing facilities, creating additional jobs and income for people in the community.
- ❖ As a result of bringing electric power to the packing plant, community homes also received electricity.

### REPLICATION AND RESOURCES MOBILIZED

Over the last two years, PROEXSAL has received attention from national and international organizations for its efforts in helping small-scale growers market their produce. Ministry of Agriculture and Ministry of Planning officials, local government authorities, the U.S. ambassador, USAID officials, USAID contractors, OXFAM America staff, Austrian Cooperation Agency

officials, and Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) representatives visited the vegetable processing plant at Los Planes. IDB officials, impressed by project results, awarded PROXSAL a grant for \$600,000 to replicate the Los Planes experience in other communities in the country.

#### **PROXSAL IS RECOGNIZED**

On December 1, 1999, PROXSAL received the 1999 National Environment Award from the Ministry of Environment for its promotion of organically grown vegetables and fruit and its contribution to ecologically sound farming practices.

#### **PROXSAL'S FUTURE IS ASSURED**

PROXSAL has identified and opened new markets for organically grown vegetables and is expanding opera-

tions to include processing and marketing of organically grown fruits. It is training, for a fee, supermarket chain employees on the proper handling of fresh produce.

PROXSAL's know-how management style is being transferred to Los Planes cooperative members, who already are managing the processing plant facility and soon will be taking over the quality control phase of the operation, thus keeping in-house 100 percent of all earnings.

PROXSAL's membership has increased from 11 to 14. In addition, cooperative members who run the green-house are seeing an increase in their sale of seedlings as new local farmers adopt organic farming practices.



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